

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received MAY - 8 1984

date entered JUN 7 1984

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic The Franklin Buildings

and/or common The Franklin Block (preferred)

2. Location

street & number 75 Congress Street N/A not for publication

city, town Portsmouth N/A vicinity of

state New Hampshire code 33 county Rockingham code 15

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Robert S. Merowitz

street & number 313 Washington Street

city, town Newton N/A vicinity of state MA 02158

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Registry of Deeds, Rockingham County Courthouse

street & number Hampton Road

city, town Exeter state NH 03833

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Portsmouth Historic District Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1982 federal state county local

depository for survey records Portsmouth Advocates (copies in Portsmouth Public Library)

city, town Portsmouth state New Hampshire

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date <u> N/A </u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Franklin Block is a massive, brick, three-story Victorian commercial block with ground floor shops facing Congress Street on its main facade, as well as Vaughan Mall (formerly Vaughan Street) and Fleet Street until recent years. The shop fronts have all been altered extensively over the past sixty years. However, the carved stone pilasters and other original Victorian ornamentation still surrounds the central entrance on Congress Street, although presently partly obscured by a modern theater marquee.

Above the altered street level on the three major elevations are large paired windows within decorative arches to the third story and over single windows at the second story. The latter are capped with flat granite lintels on the west side and with decorative brick and masonry arches joining two windows beneath the third story arch windows in the two bays closest to the arches of the third floor with wooden panels between the stories.

On the Congress Street facade, the second story windows combine individual brick and masonry arches over single windows with paired windows with larger arches like those on the west facade corner. These form a regular pattern that originally alternated the larger arches with pediments above the cornice over the single window bays. The third floor arched windows, paired except for the narrower single window in the third bay from each end, are articulated by decorative brickwork and stone banding at the lintel level and by projecting corbels which once supported brick pediments above the brick panelwork of the cornice. Identical corbel decoration continues over the two arched windows at the Congress Street corner of the east and west facades.

The east wall along Fleet Street is nearly identical in fenestration above the ground floor with that on the west facade. However, the inset panels between the floors is of brick and the sill of the third floor windows in the three northerly bays is raised and the central bay reverses areas of brick and glass, with decorative brick panels inset within the arch. Originally the upper story windows had 1 over 1 sash, although many were changed to 2 over 2 about 1900. The majority are now boarded over and missing their sash, while the three northerly bays of the east facade have been into tripart sash and the northerly bay altered for a fire door to the fire escape at the corner.

Above the central bays of the Congress Street entrance is a granite plaque carved with "Franklin 1879 Buildings" and decorative rosettes between each word and the date. Originally there was a larger brick pediment above this plaque over the decorative cornice. The pediments were all removed sometime after 1920, when the present plain brick parapet incorporating the plaque was installed.

The Franklin Block is U-shaped with the rear four bays on each side separated by a ventilation shaft bridged-over at the upper story in part. Thus, the rear wall is in two sections with that of the east wing projecting slightly beyond that of the west. The east rear wall shows evidence of irregularly placed windows that are now bricked in. The west rear wall retains window openings in the bays nearest Vaughan Mall on the second and third floor with replacement sash of about 1900.

The wings once contained two halls or theatres, but the west one was removed and rebuilt for offices by 1902 and the galleries of the east theatre seem to have been rebuilt about the same time. The offices in the west wing and along the second story of the Congress St. have been remodeled many times over this century. The vertical circulation from the main entrance is replaced at the first story level but retains Victorian plaster decoration in the soffit of the stairs from the second to third stories, as well as a staircase from the

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upper stories with wooden fluted piers, turned rails and banisters at the second floor and a skylight lighting the landing and stairs to the third floor. The large front corner rooms of the third floor retain painted ceilings surrounded by strapwork in geometric patterns. Both painted ceilings have been waterdamaged by leakage behind the roof parapet.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates . 1879 . **Builder/Architect** Arthur H. Vinal, Architect (Boston, MA)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Franklin Block, built in 1879, takes its name from the 1819 Franklin Hall built by Langley Boardman which occupied the site until destroyed by fire on May 8, 1879.¹ The Franklin Block is the largest Victorian commercial building in the city of Portsmouth; it fills the southerly part of the block between Fleet and Vaughan Streets facing Congress Street, the major commercial street in the city. Designed by Boston architect Arthur H. Vinal for Alfred Stavers, a prominent local merchant, the building reflects the late 19th century expansion of commercial activity west from the nearby historic core of Market Square. A distinctive architectural contribution to the Victorian streetscape of Congress Street, it marked the introduction of mixed use for not only shops and offices, but entertainment and eating as well into the city's life.

ARCHITECTURE:

Originally called the "Franklin Buildings" for its incorporation of several functions on sites leveled by the fire, the Franklin Block is an imposing late 19th century commercial design which joins three basic spatial elements within a unifying brick exterior using a rhythmic pattern of surface decoration. Stone and brick banding emphasises its horizontality, while the arches and corbels of the same materials to pattern the three main facades adopted some of the design vocabulary of the smaller National Block (built in 1878 for Frank Jones) on the opposite corner of Fleet and Congress Streets. While the National Block retained the Mansard roofline introduced to Portsmouth in 1866 on the Kearsarge House, on Congress Street, opposite Vaughan Street, Vinal's design hid the low angles of the roof behind a parapet. Only the 1884 rebuilding of the Rockingham Hotel on State Street, from designs of Jabez Sears of Boston, adopted a similar design approach in the city during the Victorian era.

Arthur H. Vinal was a young architect whose Boston practice had only begun in 1875. The Franklin Block appears to be his earliest surviving commission. He later designed the Bangor Maine Opera House (1881) now destroyed, which shared several similarities with the Franklin Block. He also designed several public buildings during his brief tenure as Boston City Architect in 1884-1885. In that role he² is best remembered as the designer of the plans rejected for the Boston Public Library.

While the awkward pediments along the parapet were lost in this century and new shopfronts replaced earlier ones over the past fifty years, the major design features of the buildings surface survive intact. As the largest old business block in Portsmouth's downtown, yet to be rehabilitated, the high proportion of original materials and design elements which survive are significant and distinctive characteristics of the commercial type of construction of the late 19th century in Portsmouth.

COMMERCE:

After the rebuilding of Market Square between 1802 and 1813, when a series of fires destroyed the core of the city, very few major buildings were erected until after the Civil War. In the last quarter of the 19th century, with the rise in population and the growth of the brewing industry, a series of larger brick commercial buildings extended the business

9. Major Bibliographical References

C.S. Gurney, Portsmouth...Historic and Picturesque (Portsmouth, 1902; reprint 1981), pp. 25, 70, 208.

James Garvin, Historic Portsmouth (Somersworth, N.H. 1974), pp. 72-73

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1/2 Acre +

Quadrangle name Portsmouth, NH

Quadrangle scale 1:2400

UMT References

A

1	9	3	5	6	7	5	0	4	7	7	0	6	2	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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Verbal boundary description and justification

The Franklin Block occupies all of Portsmouth Tax Assessor's Map U-17, lot 5 and is 17,058 square feet. Further described in Rockingham Co. Deeds vol. 2407, pp. 183 et. seq.
- continued on sheet 3-10-2...

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	code
state	N/A	code	county	code

state	N/A	code	county	code
state	N/A	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Richard M. Candee

organization Preservation Consultant

date Oct. 10, 1983

street & number Rt. 1, Box 376

telephone (207) 363-6635

city or town Kittery

state Maine 03904

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Will I. P.

for Commisioner, Dept. of Resources & Economic Development
Deputy New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Officer

date MAY 2 1984

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Delores Byer
Keeper of the National Register

Included in the
National Register

date 6/7/84

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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center west along Congress and State Streets. Of these, the Franklin Block is the largest and most prominent. It was built for Alfred Stavers who was a Portsmouth native, sometimes Alderman, and merchant who occupied one of the Congress Street stores in the new building. As designed it held six shops on the main facade, three smaller ones on each side, a large restaurant, and two "amusement" halls in the upper floors of the wings.³ By the end of the century it contained, besides various shops, the Franklin Theater, Franklin Dance Hall, Portsmouth Athletic Hall, business offices and other commercial functions.⁴ These multipurpose spaces, typical of Victorian commercial building in larger urban areas, are unique to the Franklin Block in Portsmouth where theaters were purpose-built and shops with offices the common mixed use.

While some of these uses continued into the twentieth century, one of the public halls was removed for offices by 1902 and the theater remodeled for vaudeville and then as a movie house. Over the past twenty years, the upper floors have been unoccupied and the cellar and ground floors altered for new commercial uses.

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1. James Garvin, Historic Portsmouth (Somersworth, NH 1974) pp. 72-73.
 2. Correspondence, Richard Candee from Earle Shettleworth, Jr., SHPO Maine; Boston Public Library, Art Reference Index of Boston Architects; obituary, Boston Evening Transcript, Aug. 25, 1923; William H. Jordy, Progressive and Academic Ideals at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (Vol. 3, American Architects and Their Buildings, NYC, 1972) pp. 317-318; Ralph Adams Cram, My Life in Architecture (Boston, 1936) p. 34.
 3. Daily Evening Times (Portsmouth, NH) July 10, 1879.
 4. George F. Bacon, Portsmouth . . . and Their Leading Businessmen (Boston, 1891) p. 27.

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The Franklin Block is nearly identical with the footprint of the building itself, being approximately 133' on Congress Street, 139' on Fleet Street, and 117' on Vaughan Mall with walls built along the property line. The rear walls face a narrow pair of access alley rights-of-way included within the property lines extending a maximum of 18.7' to the depth of the line behind the auditorium wing. Thus the rear line runs beyond the alley from Vaughan Mall 50' jogs 18.7' and runs parallel with the rear of the auditorium 80.4' to Fleet Street on the northern side of the alley.

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0 1984

THE FRANKLIN BLOCK
PORTSMOUTH, NH

U-18

HANOVER STREET

STREET

U-17

FRANKLIN BLOCK →

U-20

CONGRESS STREET

CHESTNUT STREET

PORTER STREET

FLEET STREET

STREET

U-16

CHURCH STREET

Market Square

HIGH STREET

U-6

MARKET STREET

STREET

U-7

Prepared by: Portsmouth, Inc. with the assistance of E. O'Donnell & Associates, Portsmouth, Maine

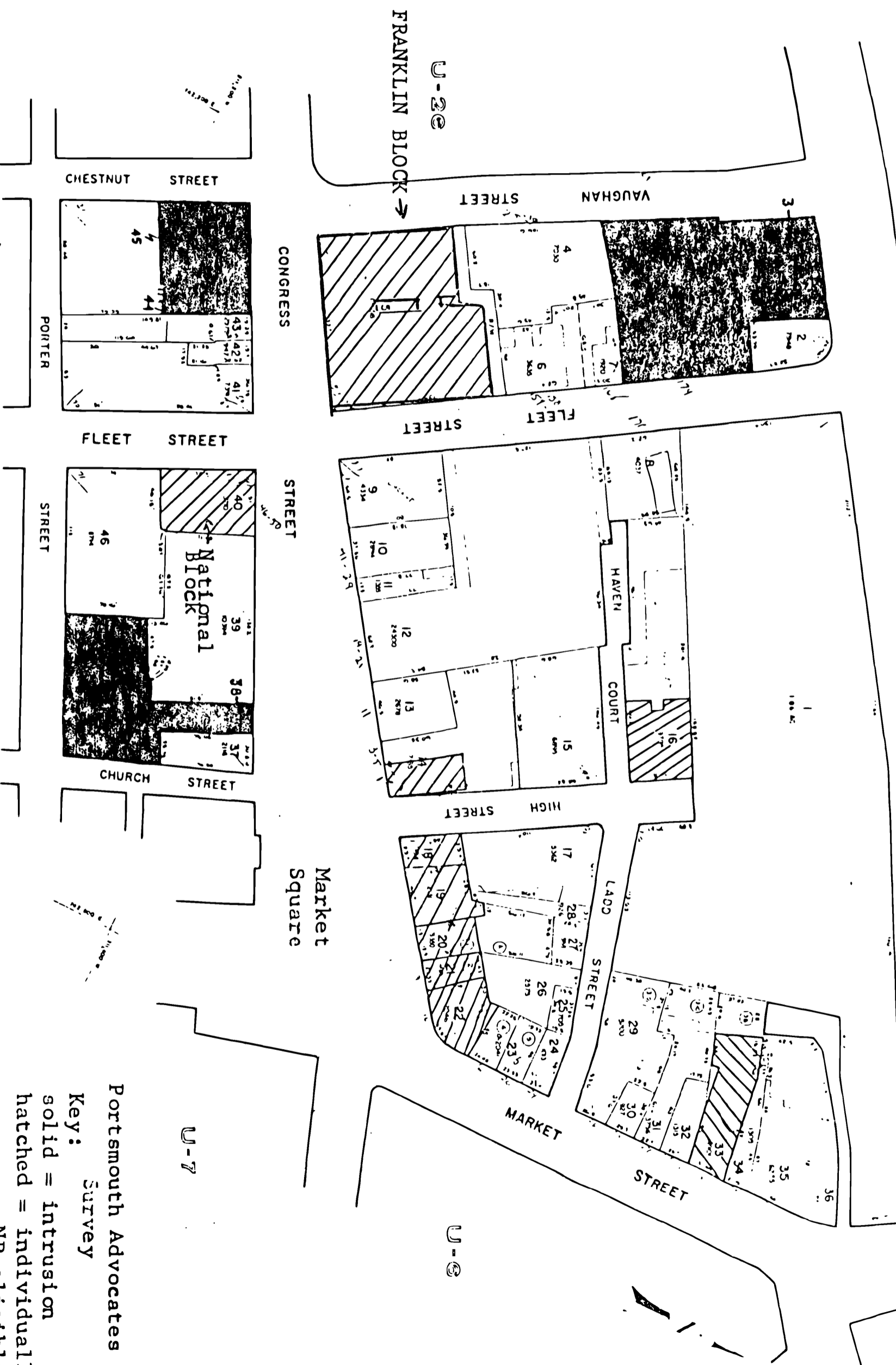
LEGEND
AUGUST 1982
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
REVISIONS LISTED
SCALE: 1" = 40'

PROPERTY MAP
PORTSMOUTH
NEW HAMPSHIRE

SCALE IN FEET
0 40 80

U-17

Portsmouth Advocates
Key:
Survey
solid = intrusion
hatched = individually NR eligible



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This certifies that the appearance of the photographs have not changed.